

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

asdl
L23
c.2

JK

AFTER THE OIL SPILL...

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND

11/6/90

HEART OF THE
CHUGACH NATIONAL
FOREST

CORDS
CHANCH

9.91

11/5/90
9.124



United States
Department of
Agriculture

PREPARED BY
Forest
Service

Leaflet
RIO-MB-82.

THE SOUND -- STILL A GREAT PLACE TO VISIT

Each year vacationers by the tens of thousands come to Prince William Sound. They are attracted by magnificent glaciers, pristine waters, humpback whales, the surrounding spruce/hemlock forest, outstanding fishing and much more. It is truly one of the most spectacular marine ecosystems in the world.

The Sound can be experienced in a variety of ways: kayak, inflatable, powerboat, tour boat, cruise ship, Alaska state ferry and float and wheel plane. Charters can be arranged out of Anchorage, Whittier, Valdez, Cordova and Seward.

If you thrill in catching fresh water and saltwater fish on light tackle, the Sound offers plenty of action. Five species of Pacific salmon, Dolly Varden char, trout, shrimp, halibut, crab, clams and other delectable critters from the deep challenge anglers each year.

And if you are a hunter, you will find ducks and geese, deer, bear and even some moose.

These recreation activities in Prince William Sound were greatly affected during the summer of 1989, as massive oil spill cleanup work occurred. In the

future, however, as the cleanup is scaled back, visitors will encounter few, if any, field work crews and cleanup activities.

THE SPILL

Much has been written about the Exxon Valdez oil spill of March 24, 1989, and its effects on the natural resources of Prince William Sound. But little has been said about the many places in the Sound that have remained oil free and beautiful.

There is no question that parts of this special place have been seriously marred by the spill. However, the entire northern and eastern parts of Prince William Sound are essentially free of oil. Such popular areas as Passage Canal out of Whittier, Blackstone Bay, Cochrane Bay, Port Wells, Harriman Fiord and College Fiord are as breathtaking as ever. Port Fidalgo and Port Gravina south of Valdez are also oil free. So far it appears that oil has not impacted Hinchinbrook and Hawkins islands. Oil has washed ashore on some scattered shorelines of northwestern Montague Island and the extreme southern tip of the island. Please refer to the map.

In the hours following the grounding of the Exxon Valdez, 260,000 barrels of crude oil spilled into Prince William Sound. Ocean currents carried the oil southwest toward Knight Island and other islands and mainland shorelines in the vicinity. Oil spread to Kenai Fjords National Park and Preserve on the Kenai Peninsula, southern parts of Cook Inlet, Katmai National Park and Preserve, Kodiak Island and other mainland areas and islands along the Alaska Peninsula.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 349 miles of shoreline within Prince William Sound -- about one tenth of the Sound's total shoreline -- were oiled to some extent, along with portions of the Kenai and Alaska peninsulas.

Exxon, under the direction of the U.S. Coast Guard, is managing the cleanup. At its peak, the company had 1,400 vessels, 85 aircraft, millions of dollars of equipment and 12,000 people involved in cleanup operations. State and federal agencies, including the Forest Service, continue to provide inspectors to monitor the cleanup.

As time passed after the spill, the oil began to "weather." Oil whipped into a froth by winds and waves in open water changed from a free-flowing liquid to a thicker "mousse," so-called because of its resemblance to the chocolate dessert. Some oil congealed into small floating globules (tar balls) in open water or washed up on shorelines. Oil that coated rocks, dried in the sun and turned into tar.

Naturally-occurring, oil-eating bacteria greatly increased in numbers after the spill and aided the cleanup by consuming quantities of oil. Severe winter storms and scouring tides will continue to disperse the oil and cleanse shorelines.



Welcome to Prince William Sound

Map data compiled by the State of Alaska, Dept. of Natural Resources and Dept. of Environmental Conservation and the National Wildlife and Atmospheric Administration



Legend

- Chugach National Forest
- Cumulative extent of oil coverage from March 24, 1989, to June 20, 1989
- Sites where cleanup crews will be working during the summer of 1990 (a total of approximately 100 miles of shoreline)

NOTE: Although the map shows only cleanup sites for the summer of 1990, oil may be encountered along other mainland and island shorelines.

Approximate Scale
0 5 10 15 20 miles

EFFECTS OF THE OIL -- TODAY AND TOMORROW

Mammal and bird rehabilitation centers were set up in communities within and outside of the Sound. But despite desperate efforts to save them, tens of thousands of birds and hundreds of sea otters are known to have died in Southcentral Alaska as a result of this tragedy. An unknown number of dead will probably never be found. Although this toll has been high, birds and marine mammals continue to thrive in parts of the Sound unaffected by the oil.

It is difficult to predict the long-term impacts of this disaster because never before has a spill of this magnitude occurred in this kind of environment. Exxon and state and federal agencies, including the Forest Service, will be conducting environmental studies in the Sound in the coming years. Information from these activities will help us better manage the Chugach National Forest.

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is the oil toxic? If the oil is not ingested, it is not toxic to humans according to the Alaska Division of Public Health. If you get oil on your skin, simply wash it off with soap and water. Oiled clothing may be washed in the usual way. Public health officials discourage the use of harsh detergents, solvents or other chemicals to clean skin or clothes.

What if you get oil on your boat? Oil will not harm boat hulls, but it will stain them. Hulls should be cleaned with a mild biodegradable detergent and then waxed.

What if you encounter an oil boom? Following the accident, floating barriers called "booms" were deployed across bays and coves to protect hatcheries and other critical fish and wildlife areas. Light absorbent booms may still be deployed at some locations. They should not be disturbed in any way.

What if you see an oiled dead or live animal? All dead, oiled bird carcasses should be retrieved. Dried or scavenged, non-oiled bird carcasses should not be disturbed.

All sea otter carcasses, oiled or not, should be retrieved.

Sick or injured sea otters or birds should not be handled, chased or fed.

Special forms from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) need to be filled out every time a bird or otter is retrieved or an oiled bird or otter is observed. To obtain these forms and for more information, contact the nearest USFWS office.

Is the seafood from Prince William Sound safe to eat? The Alaska Department of Health & Social Services knows of no ingredients in the oil that accumulate in fish that might result in human illness or disease. If, however, a fish or shellfish smells or tastes of oil, it should not be eaten. The State of Alaska will continue to sample the fish and other seafood caught in Prince William Sound for traces of oil.

The Oil Spill and the Forest Service

Since the oil spill occurred in the middle of the Chugach National Forest, the Forest Service has had a number of responsibilities with respect to the oil spill cleanup. These include:

- *protecting biological and cultural resources on the national forest,
- *guiding planning for shoreline cleanup,
- *authorizing the use of the national forest for emergency operations and
- *evaluating and inspecting shoreline cleanup.

For More Information...

If you would like current information about recreation in Prince William Sound, please contact

Supervisor's Office
Chugach National Forest
201 E. 9th. Ave., Suite 206
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
TEL (907) 271-2500

